DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 336 706 CG 023 682

AUTHOR Merritt, Rebecca Davis; Skacel, Robert K., Jr.
TITLE College Students' Perceptions of the Sexual Interest of a Young Woman and Man: Cognitive Expectancy of a Gender Effect.
PUB DATE May 91
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Psychological Association (63rd, Chicago, IL, May 2-4, 1991).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Students; Dating (Social); Drinking; Expectation; Higher Education; *Interests; *Sex Differences; *Sexuality; *Student Attitudes

ABSTRACT

Research examining how consumption of alcohol is expected to affect the sexuality of young men and women has found that subjects who rated the female drinker expected alcohol to facilitate a greater increase in sexuality for the target than did subjects who rated the male drinker. This research, however, did not employ a nonalcohol drinking control condition. This study was conducted to examine subjects' expectations of men's and women's sexuality (or more specifically, their level of interest in having sexual intercourse) in the context of a first-date situation that takes place in a setting in which alcohol consumption commonly occurs. Male (N=20) and female (N=16) college students rated male and female vignette characters' degree of sexual interest in a heterosexual first-date situation in which neither character consumed alcohol. Both female and male subjects perceived the male character as having more interest in sexual intercourse than the female character. These findings suggest a need to evaluate the effect of gender within cognitive expectancy research attempting to assess the role of alcohol consumption upon sexual interest and/or aggression. (NB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED336706

College Students' Perceptions of the Sexual Interest of a Young Woman and Man: Cognitive Expectancy of a Gender Effect

Rebecca Davis Merritt and Robert K. Skacel, Jr.

Purdue University

Paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Psychological Association, Chicago, IL, May, 1991.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Robert K. Skacel Jr.

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CG023682

Abstract

Female and male college students rated male and female vignette characters' degree of sexual interest in a heterosexual first-date situation. Although neither character consumed alcohol, their first-date setting was one in which alcohol consumption is typical. Both female and male subjects perceived the male character as having more interest in sexual intercourse than the female character. Results are discussed in terms of the need to evaluate the effect of gender within cognitive expectancy research attempting to assess the role of alcohol consumption upon sexual interest and/or aggression.

College Students' Perceptions of the Sexual Interest of a Young Woman and Man: Cognitive Expectancy of a Gender Effect

There has been a recent trend within the alcohol research area to assess the nature of people's beliefs about alcohol consumption and how these expectancies affect their subsequent alcohol-related behavior (Leigh, 1987). This cognitive expectancy research framework has suggested that the effects of alcohol are at least partially a function of people's beliefs about the power of alcohol to change its drinker. Thus, both the pharmacological effects of alcohol and the cognitive expectancies concerning the effects of its consumption are thought to determine the behavior choices of the drinking individual (Critchlow, 1986).

One strategy researchers have used to study alcohol expectancies requires nondrinking subjects to estimate the likely effect of varying levels of consumption upon the expression of specific behaviors. In an effort to explore how consumption of alcohol is expected to affect the sexuality of young men and women, George, Gournic, and McAfee (1988) utilized a modified version of Southwick, Steele, Marlatt, and Lindell's (1981) Alcohol Effects Scale (AES) to assess subjects' estimates of how they believed moderate and high doses of alcohol would affect the "typical young man" and "typical young woman." These investigators found that subjects who rated the female drinker

expected alcohol to facilitate a greater increase in sexuality for the target than those who rated the male drinker. They did not, however, employ a nonalcohol drinking control condition, and thus while they showed that a young woman's sexuality is expected to be more affected than a young man's by an increased consumption of alcohol, they are not justified in stating, "the female drinker was perceived as being more sexual than the male drinker" (p. 1299). Even if it is the case that female drinkers experience a greater increase in sexuality than males after having consumed alcohol, this does not demonstrate that they are seen as "more sexual" overall. In fact, given the cognitive expectancies associated with gender stereotypes, it is quite possible that the typical young man is seen by subjects as substantially "more sexual" than the typical young woman when both are completely sober.

Several researchers have found that the use of alcohol by both genders appears to be a risk factor for females experiencing a variety of sexual aggression including date rape (Koss & Dinero, 1989; Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987). More information is needed concerning cognitive expectancies of both female and male subjects pertaining to both alcohol and sexual aggression. The present study is part of a larger investigation evaluating cognitive expectancies of college students as they relate to the effect of alcohol consumption upon sexuality and sexual aggression.

The purpose of the present study was to obtain such a

baseline measure of subjects' expectations of men's and women's sexuality (or more specifically, their level of interest in having sexual intercourse) in the context of a first-date situation that takes place in a setting in which alcohol consumption commonly occurs. It was predicted that subjects would expect a sober male target to be more interested than a sober female target in having sexual intercourse.

Method

Subjects

Twenty male and 16 female undergraduates served as subjects. Some received research participation credit toward a psychology course for their involvement in the study while others were recruited on a voluntary basis from other psychology classes. Subjects completed the experimental procedures in small groups. Data from those who responded incorrectly to a series of manipulation checks were not included in the final pool of subjects.

Materials and Procedure

Subjects were provided written informed consent after hearing the experimenter read a statement of consent. Following this, general instructions were given. Subjects were asked to work on the experimental materials at their own pace until they turned to a page instructing them to stop and await further instructions. These materials included a demographic information sheet, and for half of the subjects, a modified version of the

Drinking Practices Questionnaire (DPQ) (Cahalan, Cisin, & Crossley, 1969), an instrument commonly used to assess subjects' drinking habits. The remaining subjects filled out the DPQ only after completing all other experimental materials. This difference in order of presentation was counterbalanced separately for female and male subjects. Once all subjects arrived at the "stopping point," they were instructed to turn to the next page, which contained the following vignette describing a first-date interaction between two hypothetical people, Diane and Tom:

> Tom and Diane, both in their mid-twenties, had met recently at a party given by a mutual friend. They spent most of the party talking and dancing with each other, and when the evening was over, they made plans to get together on Friday. When Friday finally came, each was anxious, eager to make a good impression, and hopeful that everything would go smoothly. When Diane and Tom saw one another, each smiled in approval. The tavern was fairly crowded when they arrived, but they managed to find a cozy booth towards the back. Initially, they seemed a little uneasy and made a lot of small talk about the weather and the day's happenings. When the waitress came, Tom and Diane each ordered a soft drink. As the evening progressed, they both became more talkative, freely expressing their views on movies, books, school, politics, and any other topic that came up between them. Their conversations flowed easily and they genuinely seemed to enjoy each other's company. By the end of the evening, they felt like old friends. After Diane and Tom each had several more soft drinks, it was getting late, so they decided to call it a night and left the tavern together.

Each subject was given three minutes to read and study the vignette, which is an adaptation of one used by George et al. (1988), with modifications for the type of beverages consumed, the amount of artifactual gender stereotyping, and the name of the male character from "Bradley" to the more common name of

"Tom."

Following the vignette, each subject was asked ten questions rated on 7-point scales ranging from "definitely not" (1) to "definitely" (7). Two of these questions ("Does Diane want to have sexual intercourse with Tom?" and "Does Tom want to have sexual intercourse with Diane?") served as measures of sexual interest. As a means of evaluating the vignette and checking the experimental manipulations, a postexperimental questionnaire was completed by all subjects, asking them (among other things) to indicate the type and quantitiy of beverages consumed by Diane and Tom.

Before being dismissed, subjects were thanked for their participation and in accordance with the procedures of Muehlenhard and Linton (1987), told that:

> Sexual aggression is never justified. When an individual says no, the partner should stop making sexual advances. If intercourse occurs after this point, it is rape.

Results and Discussion

To test the hypothesis that subjects would expect a male target character (Tom) to be more interested than a female target character (Diane) in having sexual intercourse when both characters are sober, a one-way repeated measures analysis of variance was conducted to compare subjects' ratings on Question 1 (Does Diane want to have sexual intercourse with Tom?) versus Question 2 (Does Tom want to have sexual intercourse with Diane?)

As predicted, it was found that subjects felt Tom was more interested (M=3.67) than Diane (M=3.14) in having sexual intercourse, $F(1,35) = 18.50$, $p < .001$.

One might argue perhaps that on a seven-point scale, a difference of 0.53 is meaningless despite its significance from a statistical standpoint. In other words, subjects do not see a vast difference between Tom's and Diane's levels of sexual interest, and neither character is seen as having an especially high degree of sexual interest. However, the support for the hypothesis appears to be meaningful for several reasons. First of all, it is important to note that this was a repeated-measures analysis; therefore, each subject was able to compare the sexual intercourse interest of Diane versus that of Tom, with the result that subjects reliably and consistently rated Tom as more interested. What this "means" then, is that males appear to be seen as slightly more sexually interested than females when sober. This finding is important given that George et al. (1988) found that subjects who rated a female drinker expected alcohol to facilitate a greater <u>increase</u> in sexuality for her than those who rated a male drinker expected for him, and concluded that "the female drinker was perceived as being more sexual than the male drinker" (p. 1299). Thus, the results of the study presented here suggest that George et al's (1988) conclusion may not be substantiated because they did not first establish some sort of baseline measure of male and female sexuality. Indeed, in light of the present findings, it is plausible that even with

more alcohol-facilitated sexuality, a female drinker may still be perceived as less sexual overall than a male drinker.

When evaluating the cognitive expectancies of subjects reporting perceptions of the relationships between alcohol consumption and sexual interest, it appears that two types of evaluations are necessary: 1) determining the effect of varying degrees of alcohol consumption upon male and female subjects, and 2) a comparison of the perceived sexual interest of female and male subjects in a no-alcohol condition. This is because one gender may be seen as experiencing a greater change in sexual interest as a function of alcohol consumption but may not exceed the other gender's perceived level of sexual interest.

The data from our study highlights the need for research integrating an evaluation of both alcohol consumption and sexual interest. Such a program of research needs to incorporate methodologies which allow an assessment of the role of both actual subjects' and target subjects' gender in the production of cognitive expectancies and behavior prediction or estimation. Because of the complexities associated with gender-related cognitive expectancies, we suggest that researchers use repeated measures designs whenever feasible so that both subject genders are allowed to evaluate female and male characters.

References

Cahalan, D., Cisin, I.H., & Crossley, H.M. (1969). American drinking practices: A national study of drinking behavior and attitudes. Monographs of the Rutgers Center of Alcohol Studies, 6.

Critchlow, B. (1986). The powers of John Barleycorn: Beliefs about the effects of alcohol on social behavior. American Psychologist, 41, 751-764.

George, W.H., Gournic, S.J., & McAfee, M.P. (1988). Perceptions of postdrinking female sexuality: Effects of gender, beverage choice, and drink payment. Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 18, 1295-1317.

Koss, M.P., & Dinero, T.E. (1989). Discriminant analysis of risk factors for sexual victimization among a national sample of college women. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 57, 242-250.

Leigh, B.C. (1987). Beliefs about the effects of alcohol on self and others. Journal of Studies on Alcohol, 48, 467-475.

Muehlenhard, C.L., & Linton, M.A. (1987). Date rape and sexual aggression in dating situations: Incidence and risk factors. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 34, 186-196.

Southwick, L., Steele, C., Marlatt, A., & Lindell, M. (1981). Alcohol-related expectancies: Defined by phase of intoxication and drinking experience. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 49, 713-721.